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ABSTRACT

As state governments and the public demand greater accountability from community and technical colleges, increasing focus is placed on the concept of assessing student academic achievement. To be effective, assessment processes should provide institutions with information that helps develop specific plans for improving operations. While processes for implementing assessment programs vary, basic steps include articulating the mission, establishing a planning mechanism, developing an evaluation system that determines if objectives were met, identifying critical areas of success, establishing priority standards upon which the college can judge effectiveness, determining mechanisms for documenting outcomes, and utilizing assessment results for decision making. To be effective, assessment programs should flow from the institution's mission; have a clear conceptual framework; include faculty ownership and responsibility; have institution-wide support; use multiple measures to determine student achievement; provide feedback to students and the institution; be cost-effective; not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity; lead to improvement; and include a process for evaluating the assessment program. Finally, the importance of faculty support for any assessment program cannot be overestimated and for assessment programs to prosper, institutions should create an environment in which risk-taking and experimentation are encouraged. Contains 12 references. (TGI)

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WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE CHAIR, FACULTY MEMBER, AND DEAN IN STUDENT ASSESSMENT?

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Paper Presented at the
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Recent Publications

Hernandez, V., Sorensen, R., & Nieri, A. (1995). *Fostering Economic Development and Entrepreneurship in the Community: Guide Book of Opportunities for Two Year Technical Colleges.*
Hernandez, V., Sorensen, R., & Nieri, A. (1995). *Fostering Entrepreneurship: The Role of Postsecondary Technical Education, Case Studies.*
Phelps, A. & Sorensen, R. (1992). *A Study of Ohio's Secondary and Postsecondary Vocational and Technical Education,* Ohio Commission on Educational Improvement.

What Are the Roles of the Chair, Faculty Member, and Dean in Student Assessment?

Introduction

This subject of student assessment, that reflects student academic achievement, is receiving major attention throughout education, and particularly higher education. As attention mounts on assessments, so will be issues related to the subject. Simmons (1991) summarizes well the challenges that higher education faces with the attention that assessment will be receiving:

> Notwithstanding the fact that the issue of assessment evokes strong feelings either in support of or in opposition to the concept, the critical challenge for all of us in higher education in the 1990's will not be in debating further the merits of assessment, but rather in designing the most effective approach to the achievement of enhanced quality, particularly in light of declining resources and significant changes in demographic trends.

Leading up to the debate on the merits of assessment, it will be found that many states are demanding greater accountability from public community/technical colleges, and it is likely that such state initiatives and state regulation will increase in the years to come. There are a number of reasons for this increase in accountability. One of the major reasons has been our neglect of the issue because businesses and the legislatures have held higher education in such high esteem that they have been reticent to critique the results of our educational programming. This is changing rapidly as the educational leadership in this country is being returned to the states and local communities. As block grants are developed, at the state level, the legislative process will begin to hold the states accountable for the expenditure of the funds. Another major reason is that regional accreditation criteria has been implemented for institutional effectiveness. The regional accreditation associations believe strongly that proven institutional effectiveness improves the quality of teaching and learning.

Effective assessment of student achievement involves a change of mind as well as a change of technique. We must be willing to apply what we learn from assessment to effect change in our institution. For many, if not most, institutions the recent emphasis on developing standards and achievement of those standards begs the mandate for substantial institutional change. Indeed these newly added emphases that include both documenting student academic achievement and using such documentation to foster institutional improvement can significantly change the way a college carries out its mission. As Peter T. Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management observes, "The underlying goal of any organization is to improve effectiveness" (1988).

For the remainder of the 1990's Hudgin's (1993) suggests that it is obvious why institutional effectiveness has become the hottest topic on the educational agenda.

In reviewing the literature and through on-site evaluations of community/technical colleges, on this subject of student academic achievement through various assessment approaches, it has become apparent that the roles

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of chairs, faculty, and deans are very intertwined in carrying out an assessment responsibility. Therefore, this paper will speak to the issues in total rather than approaching it by an individual college staff responsibility. An emphasis will be placed on the staff role when an emphasis is needed.

Purposes, Issues, and Principles of Assessment

Assessment is not an end in itself, but a means of gathering information that can be used in evaluating the institution's ability to accomplish its purposes in a number of areas. An assessment program, to be effective, should provide information that assists the institution in making useful decisions about the improvement of the institution and in developing plans for that improvement. As the President of Macomb Community College, Albert L. Lorenzo concludes, "Effectiveness is not a measurement process, it's a change process" (1990).

An institution contemplating an improvement in their assessment program would do well to spend time developing a plan. Without a plan, that has input from all facets of the institution, it will be doomed for failure before it is introduced. One such model of institutional effectiveness developed by the National Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges outlines the basic components of an institutional effectiveness program. While the process for developing or operationalizing institutional effectiveness varies, it normally contains seven basic steps:

1. Articulate the mission.
2. Establish a planning mechanism.
3. Develop an evaluation system that tells if "the college is doing what it says it does."
4. Identify critical areas of success.
5. Establish priority standards upon which the college can judge its effectiveness in the identified critical areas.
6. Determine mechanisms for documenting whether the established standards have been met:
   -Hard data (enrollment reports, licensure test results, transfer grades, assessment of majors, etc.)
   -Surveys (written, telephone, interviews)
   -Peer reviews
7. Utilize results of assessment for decision making.

As can be observed from the institutional effectiveness model above, Mather (1991) states that an effective and useful assessment program will be a mix of internal and external influences, inside and outside people, general and specific ideas, objective and subjective factors.

In carrying out a model for assessment, a number of characteristics within the model must be addressed. To address these characteristics Doherty and Patton (1991) provide a set of characteristics as a guide and stimulus to ongoing discussions and collaboration that should take place within an institution for an effective assessment program to be implemented. The following characteristics are offered as a framework to guide an institution's design and implementation of a program to assess student academic achievement.

1. **Flows from the institution's mission.**
Central to the existence of an educational institution is the mission to educate students and ensure their academic attainment, which is then expressed in the public awarding of credits and diplomas. From each institution's specific formulation of this central aspect of its mission and purposes flows the assessment program that provides evidence of academic achievement and enables the institution to use the documentation to improve its educational programs.

2. **Has a conceptual framework**
A conceptual framework is a set of principles that derives its definition and direction from the institution's mission and purposes. It provides direction for appropriate documentation and raises questions regarding the use of inappropriate documentation. Specifically, the principles should reinforce the importance of relating curriculum design, teaching, learning, and assessment. The frame-work should address the tendency, referred to previously, of using readily available examinations or assessments rather than creating or locating assessments specifically related to one's institutional pruposes.

3. **Has faculty ownership/responsibility**
Given the historic responsibility of faculty in judging the academic attainment of their students for the purpose of awarding credit and diplomas, this role should be self-evident. If the ultimate goal of assessment is the improvement of student learning, then faculty's role and responsibility in assessment as integral to improved student learning are crucial.

4. **Has institution-wide support**
High-level and widespread support within the institution for assessment of student academic achievement for institutional improvement is essential if faculty, staff, and students are expected to take assessment seriously. Board members, the President, and other administrators must take an appropriately active and positive role in understanding and fostering assessment goals and activities so that assessment becomes a routine way of life at the institution. Resource allocations and institutional decision-making should reflect and reinforce the importance of the assessment program at the institution.

5. **Uses multiple measures**
Because of the variety of components involved in a full description of student academic achievement and the importance of assessing student development at various stages in the student's program, it is essential that the assessment program employ multiple measures. No one instrument is rich enough to capture the range of student achievement necessary for the institution to make a judgment regarding how well it is fulfilling its purposes in this area. Diverse assessment approaches provide an invaluable source of information that can be channeled into the institution's planning processes to improve its educational programs.

6. **Provides feedback to students and the institute**
This characteristic and number nine-leads to improvement-are closely related. The major reason for listing them separately is to highlight both the crucial role of feedback to the student and the institution.
Regarding feedback to students, it is important to reinforce for institutions the contribution of timely and specific feedback to student learning.

7. **Is cost-effective**
While an institution's proposed assessment program must be well designed in order to provide information for institutional improvement, the program must also be designed to obtain maximum information for expended costs in time and money. It calls on the ability of faculty and administrators to develop appropriate timelines for those projects within the overall assessment program that can be sequenced developmentally.

8. **Does not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity established by the institution**
If institutions undertake to design more sophisticated qualitative and quantitative approaches to assessment appropriate to their distinctive institutional character and student body, then educational quality and the serving of student's diverse needs and aspirations can only improve. If, however, a restricted view of what constitutes appropriate assessment measures begins to prevail, then important values that have traditionally characterized higher education may be adversely affected. It is essential, therefore, and beneficial from many perspectives, for institutions to reflect deeply on their mission and purposes and consider their implications.

9. **Leads to improvement**
There is a necessity of selecting appropriate indicators for the educational achievement to be assessed, the judgment of data, and the evaluation of the data within the context of the institution's mission. How faculty and administrators use the information from the assessment program to make plans and set timetables to enhance their educational programs is one of the most important issues of this new assessment emphasis. The most important point to reinforce regarding this characteristic is that North Central views assessment of student academic achievement as a means, not an end.

10. **Includes a process for evaluating the assessment program**
Like other programs in the institution, the assessment program itself needs to be evaluated. An evaluation process will determine whether the conceptual framework is sound and all components are appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes, the data gathered are being used for the intended purposes, and the primary goal of the program-the improvement of educational programs and the enhancement of student academic achievement-is being attained. Through this evaluation the institution can determine what adaptations need to be made to ensure the success of its assessment program.

The faculty, the major component of any assessment program, deserves further comments. For many, if not most postsecondary institutions, the decision

to engage in comprehensive outcomes assessment constitutes a major change that will most certainly affect the lives of the faculty in very substantial and sometimes profound ways. In his book, *Megatrends*, John Naisbitt (1982) states what many people today consider to be the obvious: "People whose lives are affected by a decision must be part of the process of arriving at that decision". Hence, if we are to follow the advice of Naisbitt, the faculty must become an active player in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the assessment plan of any institution.

This point of faculty involvement was further emphasized by Eisenman (1991), when he stated:

> It is unthinkable that any substantial institutional change could ever occur, especially one that focuses on the assessment of student learning, without faculty ownership and involvement. Even if an institution could develop a system for documenting student academic achievement without faculty involvement, it is unlikely that a system so developed would ever produce documentation that would actually be used for institutional improvement. It is essential, therefore, that from the beginning, there be genuine faculty participation and involvement in the development and use of programs to assess and document student academic achievement if these programs are to have any beneficial impact on the level of student academic achievement.

The importance of faculty involvement in the development of assessment programs is stressed by many authors on the subject: most notably Astin, 1991; Erwin, 1991; Ewell, 1983; and Nichols, 1989. Eisenman (1991) summarizes these various authors by observing what appears as a common element of faculty involvement of the ownership/responsibility comes about as a result of an institutional culture or climate that places great value on assessment activities and their uses for improving institutional and educational processes and outcomes.

Conclusions

In general, institutions with healthy environments, characterized by a climate of trust in which risk-taking and experimentation are encouraged, are those in which significant assessment programs can develop and prosper. Such a climate is largely the result of efforts of campus leaders. The institutions that are successful in securing faculty participation in developing assessment programs will be the ones that are able to get an institutional dialogue going about student learning--what it should be, how it can best be brought about, how it can be observed and measured if and when it occurs, and ultimately how this information can be used to improve efforts to enhance student learning.

Braskamp (1991) states that, "Assessment is viewed as an ongoing process. It is continuous gathering, interpreting, and sharing of information involving multiple audiences--students, faculty, administrators, staff, trustees, alumni, legislatures, and the general public." What we are attempting to do with assessment is to evaluate an institution's well-being and to share that with the institution itself and the public in general so as to bring forth good public policy and decision making.

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